



China Sends 42nd and 43rd Navigation Satellites into Orbit

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China has launched two Beidou-3 navigation satellites into space aboard a Long March 3B (CZ-3B) launch vehicle. Liftoff occurred on November 19, 2018 at 2:07 a.m. local time (November 18 at 6:07 p.m. UTC; 1:07 p.m. EST) from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center.

The medium Earth orbit (MEO) satellites were the 42nd and 43rd in the Beidou constellation. The satellites are part of the third phase of Beidou deployment. Phase III includes signal upgrades compared to previous Beidou versions, and compatibility with U.S. GPS and ESA Galileo constellations. China's satellite navigation system is expected to be fully operational by 2020, with 27 MEO, five Geosynchronous Earth Orbit (GEO), and three IGSO satellites.

The satellites also represent the 17th and 18th navigation satellites to be launched by China in 2018. With such a high launch rate, the constellation is nearing completion. China plans to launch six more satellites to medium Earth orbit, three to inclined orbits, and two to geosynchronous orbit in 2019 and 2020.

The launch also represents the 33rd launch conducted by China this year. Beijing plans to conduct 35 launches in 2018. Another five launches will be conducted by commercial companies in China, bringing the national total up to 40. With only a little more than a month left to the year, it's not clear that China will achieve that ambitious goal. However, Beijing has already set a record for number of launches this year and will continue to launch at a rapid pace through the rest of the year.

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